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We Suggest

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Almy, Millie
Young Children's Thinking
New York: Teachers College Press, Columbia University
1966, Pp. xii + 153.

In this book Professor Almy presents an unusual combination of some of Piaget's theories of intellectual development, cross-sectional and longitudinal studies of such development in young children, and fresh, educational insights into ways in which these theories and data may be related to education.

In the first part, attention is given to Piaget's studies of intelligence and his views concerning development of logical thought, or cognition, in early childhood. Included are descriptions of transitions from one stage of intellectual development to the next. Four main factors which influence and promote, or hinder, development and learning are also discussed. The first three of these: *maturation,* the increasing differentiation of the nervous system; *experience,* encounter with the physical world; and *social transmission,* involvement with other human beings and education, may be more generally known and widely accepted by teachers than the fourth. Piaget calls the fourth factor *equilibration* and, for him, this self-regulation is the fundamental factor.

Corroborative research by other developmental psychologists is also reported. In general, agreement among these researchers regarding a similarity between development of the physical self and development of the intellectual self is apparent. The essential conclusion seems to be that:

> Development follows its own laws, as all of contemporary biology leads us to believe, and although each stage in the development is accompanied by all sorts of new learning based on experience, this learning is always relative to the developmental period during which it takes place, and to the intellectual structures, whether completely or partially formed, which the subject has at his disposal during this period.

In the next part of this volume, Almy reports studies of intellectual development carried on by members of the staff of the Horace

Mann-Lincoln Institute of School Experimentation. Results of the studies support Piaget's findings and underscore the educational importance of the understandings he has investigated. The author raises the following pertinent, perplexing, educational issues, some more suspect and speculative than others:

1. Matching training procedures with the child's conceptual level;
2. The role of language;
3. Matching the child's conceptual style; and
4. The problem of transition from one level of thought to the next.

In the latter part of the book, the writer notes certain educational implications. For educators, or for anyone honestly involved in helping children to develop healthy, high-level, nonegocentric thought, Piaget's theory and method hold significance. It appears crucial that a child should not be permitted to learn an appropriate answer without making certain that he can retrace his steps or arrive at the same result in another way. Teachers need to be aware of a young child's mental confusions and to be able to recognize when he has moved ahead out of such confusion. Instructors can learn to conduct experiments with their pupils designed to reveal the nature of their children's thinking. Curriculums in our schools might well expand opportunities for manipulative activity and language, social interaction among children, and the child's role in "discovery." If the essence of Piaget's theory becomes basis for method, and then program, designed to nurture logical thinking, it may contribute positively to readiness for reading, and to teachers' expertise in pacing reading and writing skills to children's maturity and rate of learning.

Readers of this book will appreciate the fine contribution Professor Almy has made in helping teachers both to understand and to use the writings of Piaget. They may be so captivated by theory and findings presented here that they may never again view children in quite the same way.